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REVIEWS OF BOOKS

The Agrarian Crusade: A Chronicle of the Farmer in Politics (*The Chronicles of America Series*, vol. 45). BY SOLON J. BUCK. (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1920. xi, 215 p.)

In the *Chronicles of America Series*, of which Dr. Buck's book is volume 45, real progress has been made in the art of history writing. Earlier efforts at collaboration have generally suffered from an undue deference to the chronological method. Each author would be assigned a definite period of years to cover, and with his own sense of values he would work out his field in his own peculiar way. Incidents would be opened by one writer never to be closed by another. Contradictions in point of view and even in matters of fact could not always be corrected by the most careful editing. And the reader of a single volume was apt to have much the feeling of the casual attendant at the "movies" who happens in on the twelfth episode of the "Perils of Pauline."

The editors of the fifty volumes of the *Chronicles of America* have avoided many of these shortcomings by adopting the topical rather than the chronological method of treatment. Each writer has been given some particular phase of the nation's development to trace through from beginning to end, with the result that each volume is a unit in itself and may be read and enjoyed entirely apart from the rest. None the less, the editors have seen to it that the units are "all articulated, and so related" that, taken together, they present a real vision of the development of this country from the beginning to the present. The old plan gave to the reader a set of short strings of assorted sizes, which he laboriously tied together to form a badly-knotted, unsymmetrical "thread of history"; the new plan provides many slender strands ready to be rolled together into one unbroken and harmonious cord.

Another departure, equally noteworthy, is the attempt to make the narratives sufficiently spirited to attract "those of our citizens who are not in the habit of reading history." The editors

rightly feel that not the few alone, but rather the many, "need to know the experiences of our nation in times past" if we as a people may hope to "interpret aright the great social and economic forces of our own times." Writers have been selected, therefore, as much for their literary ability as for their scholarly attainments; the length of each narrative has been rigorously limited to about two hundred pages; and matters of interest solely to the technical historian have been waived. Viewed as a whole, the result is fairly satisfactory, although it seems unfortunate that the price of the edition should be so high that even well-established libraries hesitate to buy it, while the ordinary reader, whom the editors profess to be so anxious to reach, can never hope to own the set. Beautifully bound and printed as this edition is, to achieve the purpose of the editors another edition less expensive should certainly be provided.

With the battle cry of the Nonpartisan League resounding throughout the state today, citizens of Minnesota can hardly be surprised at the inclusion in this series of "a chronicle of the farmer in politics." Nor can they wonder at the selection of a Minnesotan to write the narrative, for Minnesota has been in the forefront of every agrarian movement since the Civil War. As the author of a scholarly monograph on *The Granger Movement*, published in 1913, and as superintendent of the Minnesota Historical Society, Dr. Buck has necessarily come into constant contact with the chief sources of the subject upon which he writes. In fact it was well-nigh inevitable that he should be assigned the task of narrating "that phase of political history which began with the Grange, passed through Greenbackism and Populism, and finally culminated in the battle for free silver and the rise of William Jennings Bryan in 1896."

While Dr. Buck makes little pretense of contributing anything new in this volume, he has brought together in readable fashion the essential facts of the whole agrarian movement in the Northwest. If the outline here presented had been more widely understood by the reading public of a few years ago, the emergence of the Nonpartisan League might not have been viewed as so extraordinary a phenomenon. The reader of these pages can scarcely avoid the generalization that once every so often, in a period of hard times, the farmers unite to avenge

their wrongs, take a hand in politics, and make their influence felt; then, when their efforts miscarry or the fat years succeed the lean, they permit their sentiment for coöperation to disappear, their organizations to die down or die out, and once again the old order reigns. The granges of the seventies waxed strong on the argument that the lack of agricultural prosperity was mainly due to the railroads, and that their shortcomings must be remedied by the state. The movement, however, soon collapsed, though not until it had taught the farmers the value of combination, and not until it had won notable decisions from the courts affirming the "right of States to fix maximum charges for any business which is public in its nature or which has been clothed with public interest" (p. 59). Next after the Granger movement followed the rise and fall of Greenbackism, with its contention that through currency inflation the farmer might increase the price of the things he had to sell, and at the same time prevent the appreciation of his debts. The Greenbackers yielded in their turn to the founders of the farmers' alliances, who endorsed every good thing, and finally in conjunction with the forces of labor blossomed forth as the People's Party. Carried away by the free silver fetish, this movement, too, met disaster, going down to defeat with Bryan in 1896. The reviewer is sorry, though doubtless Dr. Buck is not, that the editors saw fit to exclude any detailed treatment of the twentieth century farmers' activities in politics. It would be interesting to know the author's speculations on the probabilities of history repeating itself.

In spite of the popular manner of presentation employed, this book has the earmarks of scholarly workmanship. The bibliographical note at the close shows the author's wide familiarity with the sources, and the methods of the trained historian are by no means obscured by the scarcity of footnotes in the body of the work. Chapter 5, for example, which explains why the Granger movement collapsed, could never have been written by the merely casual investigator. The author, moreover, maintains an attitude of complete impartiality. The wrongs of the farmers are recognized, but so also are their excesses. At no time does he lay himself open to the charge of special pleading.

The book is undeniably entertaining. It ought to be of some interest even to the "dry-as-dust historian" to note how this end

is achieved. In the first place, the thread of the story is never lost. In spite of many incidental analyses of causes and effects, the reader generally has his attention fixed upon a narrative. Again, much is made of the many extraordinary individuals who adorn the pathway of the agrarian crusade. Four pages, for example, are devoted to a presentation of our own Ignatius Donnelly, and two to "Sockless Jerry Simpson" of Kansas. Several lively episodes such as the meeting of the Kansas legislature of 1893 have also been fortunate enough to escape an undeserved proscription. Finally the author has a ready and graceful flow of English. The volume merits and doubtless will obtain a wide popularity, especially in Minnesota and the Northwest.

JOHN D. HICKS

The Michigan Fur Trade (Michigan Historical Publications, University Series, vol. 5, pp. i-xii, 1-201). By IDA AMANDA JOHNSON. (Lansing, Michigan Historical Commission, 1919.)

This volume is made up of two monographs, one on the fur trade and the other a history of *The Pere Marquette Railroad Company*. Since the latter study has no special interest for Minnesota readers it will not be reviewed here. It might be in place, however, to criticise the policy of binding in the same volume two monographs as different in character as these two are. Each has its own title-page and index, and there is no title-page for the volume as a whole, in spite of the fact that it is paged consecutively throughout.

The monograph on the fur trade comprises a survey, in nine short chapters, of the French, British, and American periods of the trade in Michigan, with an additional chapter on "The Trader's Life." The first chapter, "Pioneer Trade," deals with the French policy and introduces such characters as Nicolet, Groseilliers and Radisson, La Salle, and the Jesuits. With chapter 2 the scene shifts to Detroit and an account is given of the work of Cadillac and his successors, while chapter 3 deals with the rivalry of Michilimackinac and other posts with Detroit. Chapters 4 and 5 take up the British policy and early trade, bringing the story down to 1796, when the posts were surren-